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ABSTRACT

Forum 8 is concerned with obstacles to educational reform which are based on obsolete myths. Forum members urgently advocate alternatives to the traditional public school approach. Since the idea that there is "one best way" to educate is one of the myths, reform must be fluid enough to accommodate individual student style, attitude, and readiness. This report proposes such reform and includes: (1) a brief analysis of the content of several myths considered; (2) an explanation of the educational consequences of maintaining the status quo based on those false assumptions; (3) a look at the evidence which undermines the myth's validity; and in some cases (4) consideration of possible alternatives. Encouraging a variety of alternative educational models, the forum recommends new public school systems independent of state and local regulations, open education approaches, open enrollment policies, and cross-age classroom patterns. With parents and teachers joining together, existing regulations and requirements must be suspended to provide sufficient autonomy for experimentation. The report includes an appendix of the myths discussed and an extensive bibliography of references used. (Author/AJ)

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MYTHOLOGY IN AMERICAN EDUCATION: A GUIDE TO CONSTRUCTIVE CONFRONTATION

Report of Forum 8

1970 White House Conference on Children

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SUMMARY

From the first attempts at conceptualization and transfer of knowledge around primordial campfires, myth has played the important role of presenting powerful images by which the traditions, customs, and world views of the overall culture are passed on to succeeding generations. Because myths accrete slowly over time, they often remain culturally embedded long after the disappearance of the social contexts which once made them useful. The myths which Forum 8 has been analyzing are obsolete assumptions and ill-founded beliefs which have remained buried in our educational system for so long that we have often accepted their validity without question. These myths, while too numerous to list, include "Children have to go to school to learn," "Teachers know and children don't," and "Schools prepare children for the future."

The curriculum, the objectives, and the structure of our present educational system are products of another age -- responses to the needs of a society immersed in the rapid transition from rural/agricultural to urban/industrial life styles.

Today, education in America must meet new needs as our society makes a second major transition into an era of high mobility and instantaneous communication -- an era which each day brings us closer to Marshall McLuhan's "global village."

Much of our educational system has failed to meet the

challenges presented by this rapid transformation. We believe that our educational mythology severely inhibits ability to respond to the new demands and that confrontation of these assumptions is the first prerequisite to reform. Too long have our children been learning in spite of, rather than because of, our efforts; it is imperative to reverse this trend.

In the face of the mythological obstacle course facing those who see the urgent need for educational reform, what can be realistically suggested?

We must encourage with a powerful sense of urgency alternative educational models. "The One Best Way" myth leads us on an endless search for perfection, at the cost of many useful sub-system and alternatives discarded simply because they fail to address themselves simultaneously to all our concerns. The plain truth is that no magic formula exists which will make everything better. Students do not learn identically any more than teachers teach identically. Instead of knocking off the individual sharp edges, we should move in an opposite direction by making our schools fluid enough to accommodate individual differences of style, attitude, and readiness. Let us move toward a multi-faceted educational system incorporating what we know of human diversity, with mechanisms for choice and change.

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INTRODUCTION

From the first attempts at conceptualization and transfer of knowledge around primordial campfires, myth has played the important role of presenting powerful images by which the traditions, customs and world views of the overall culture are passed on to succeeding generations. Because myths accrete slowly over time, they often remain culturally embedded long after the disappearance of the social contexts which once made them useful. The myths which Forum 8 has asked you to analyze in our illustrated booklet are obsolete assumptions and ill-founded beliefs which have remained buried in our educational system for so long that we have often accepted their validity without question.

For the most part, perpetuation of these beliefs has not resulted from a conscious effort of ogres engaged in a conspiracy to freeze America's educational system in the nineteenth-century mold. We all share the responsibility for their perpetuation.

The curriculum, the objectives, and the structure of our present educational system are products of another age -- responses to the needs of a society immersed in the rapid transition from rural/agricultural to urban/industrial life styles.

Today, education in America must meet new needs as our society makes a second major transition into an era of high mobility and instantaneous communication -- an era which each day brings us closer to Marshall McLuhan's "global village."

Much of our educational system has failed to meet the challenges presented by this rapid transformation. We believe

that our educational mythology severely inhibits ability to respond to the new demands and that confrontation of these assumptions is the first prerequisite to reform. Too long have our children been learning in spite of, rather than because of, our efforts; it is imperative to reverse this trend.

Our approach to dealing with each of the myths has been to include: (1) a brief analysis of the content of each myth; (2) an explanation of the educational consequences of maintaining the status quo based on those false assumptions; (3) a look at the evidence which undermines the myth's validity; and in some cases (4) consideration of some of the possible alternatives. We want to stress that we have not reflected all the myths and we hope that delegates can and will make additions. A complete listing of all the myths considered by our forum is given at the end of this paper to serve as a point of departure for those wishing to construct their own critique of American educational mythology.

The focus of our discussions is not the dissolution of one monolithic educational system to replace it with one more to our liking. We refuse to endorse any single educational program as a panacea for our ills. Rather, we hope that our efforts will encourage, during the coming decade, a proliferation of educational methodologies to explore the numerous available alternatives.

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"Children Have To Go To School To Learn"

Although most of us pay lip service to the notion that learning can take place virtually anywhere and anytime, our worshipful attitude toward formal schooling reveals a refusal to explore alternatives which maximize learning outside the classroom.

A spoof in Phi Delta Kappan entitled, "Harry, the Crawler," suggested what our future might be like if we continue to permit our educational system to evolve into a sprawling labyrinth of requirements and prerequisites: children would eventually have to attend and graduate from Crawling School before we would recognize their ability to successfully meet all of the requirements of "Crawling 101." Consider the extraordinary amount of learning which takes place during a child's first four years, most of which is beyond the purview of any classroom or educational institution. The article takes on added force if we consider how poorly we utilize learning which takes place outside the classroom at all age levels; daily lessons taught by the media, where a child's attention is stronger than it is for most teachers; the stories told by Aunt Emma about life on the other side of the state (or on the other side of the world); the lessons of siblings and the learning effects of unsupervised play, such as those related by Susan Miller in her Psychology of Play; the experiences of summer camp, field trips, and the indispensible "survival skills" learned by the ghetto child outside the classroom.

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The growing number of schools dedicated to the amplification and use of "non-formal," out-of-class experiences as the central core of their curricula indicates that educators are beginning to recognize the potential of these largely untapped sources of learning. In these preliminary attempts, they are seeking alternatives which will enable them to capitalize on all experiences relevant to the child's world. The World of Inquiry School in Rochester, New York; The Urban School in San Francisco, California; Project Gold Mind in Woodland, California; Metro in Chicago; and the Parkway Project in Philadelphia are a few examples of schools where the entire community is legitimized as a learning resource for the children. In programs such as these, the disparity which children often feel between school and "real life" is narrowed considerably.

"Teachers Know and Children Don't"

One of our most destructive educational myths is that "teachers know and children don't." This myth's psychological consequence is the preservation of an authoritarian school model, which runs counter both to the democratic ideal of encouraging students to think for themselves and to learning theories which indicate that as students grow older they depend more on their peers for information than their elders.

The educational consequence of this myth is teacher-oriented rather than student-oriented schools. Historically, the teacher has been the focus of learning because he was the

primary source of knowledge about the outside world. Today the proliferation and diffusion of information has placed the role of teacher in a different context. The availability of knowledge through visual media as well as the abundance of leisure time for travel and enjoyment of cultural events have broadened the horizons of most students, reducing the teacher's monopoly on information. And the rapidity with which the known world now changes provides new perspectives and reduces the "stability" of previous knowledge, so that a teacher may frequently have difficulty keeping up with changes in our society -- changes about which students may be the most informed sources.

One alternative which might help us break out of the authoritarian mold, already in experimental use, is cross-age teaching. Such an alternative may offer tutorials to seventh and eighth grade students as well as fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students in an attempt to: (1) increase the academic achievement of both younger and older students by providing individualized help for the younger and reinforcing learning for the older; (2) enhance the socialization process of the younger child by encouraging interpersonal relationships with older children; (3) enhance the socialization process of the older child; and (4) improve the self-image of both the younger and older child.

Our search for new ways to involve the student as teacher in the learning process must not diminish the status of the teacher. We envision the role of the teacher taking on a new importance, as children become aware of the value of the special perspectives and judgment of the oldest "student" in the classroom.

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"Schools Prepare Children for the Future"

Few people would argue that we currently provide more than minimal preparation for the future. Jerome Bruner and others have been writing for years about the need to prepare our children with the process skills which will enable them to keep up with changing content, yet we continue to launch children into the world with only rudimentary skills in the three R's. Perhaps most wasteful, our children are sent forth with little preparation for improving the skills they do possess; they are even less able to modify their previous learning to accomodate the difficult but inevitable changes of a society in technological, social, and spiritual explosion.

Our emphasis has been on factual storage, yet most of us will admit (at least to another adult) that we remember little of the factual material we consumed as children. We have known for some time that the skill of locating rather than simply recalling factual knowledge is paramount. We are further finding that curricula which help a child deal with his feelings and emotions, which teach principles of self-control, and which help the child cope with the pressures and frustrations of an industrial society are desperately needed yet almost totally lacking. We need to teach the productive use of leisure time so that freedoms gained through technology become avenues of self-expression.

Most of all, as Phillip Combs in World Educational Crisis suggests, we must develop curricula which motivate our young to deal affirmatively with a world which is largely non-white, poor,

and non-Western. Although these skills and attitudes are more crucial than many we currently force children to learn, we have yet to begin to act on our knowledge. In part, our future will be what we will it to be. Our reality is changing, more rapidly as one social upheavel triggers others. We must educate for adaptability in an ambiguous future, rather than train the memory to recall past certainities.

"Schools Teach the Truth"

Although the student's letter in our booklet, page 11, speaks for itself, we would like to discuss this myth further.

In 1953, UNESCO, a branch of the United Nations, decided to produce a world history book which would objectively recount the emergence of the world's nations, without the national bias common among works by individual historians. The project foundered, illustrating the difficulty of achieving objectivity and truth ahead of nationalism and self-interest.

Minority voices, critical of the writing of American history, reveal the failures of treatments of our past. The sins are primarily those of omission rather than commission, and the perpetuation of misleading partial truths. The celebration of Columbus Day, considered by some American Indians one of the worst insults they are forced to endure, ignores the fact that the existence of the American continent was known centuries before the European adventurer's arrival. The scandalous list of broken treaties between Indian nations and the United States

is seldom discussed in our schools. Nor is the ironic and tragic death of the Black man who perfected the use of blood plasma -- a white hospital refused to give him the needed transfusion. Some schools teach that America has always won her wars (overlooking the details of the War of 1812), or that America has never played the role of the aggressor (ignoring the Mexican-American War and the taking of the Philippines in the Spanish-American War). While these notes are being written, a colleague of a forum member is being suspended from his job because the town power structure does not approve of his teaching known theories of the origin of the universe -- versions of Genesis which they fear point toward the theory of evolution.

Despite the American experience of frontiers and constant change, we seem to be convinced that knowledge is sacred, certain, and fixed. Perhaps that is why we tend to rigidly measure our children's efforts in school: we assume that schools dispense "objective" knowledge, and that it can be uniformly packaged, distributed, and monitored. Both the children and the learning process become fixed in their relationship to "objective" knowledge, and we suppose that we can distinguish a good student from a poor one in terms of this fixed relationship.

In our lock-step march toward truth, we fail to grasp that every child possesses the precious faculty of educability which makes knowledge possible. Teachers must respect this faculty. We do not honor the intelligence of children when we insist, as normally do, upon focusing children's attention almost exclusively upon those external, pre-determined, and easily manageable bits

of information which teachers and school administrators find convenient to evaluate. Facts are important only as part of a larger process; they are the most visible figures which emerge from the soil of human intelligence. The crucial task of the educational process is to develop an awareness which links figures and grounds into meaningful wholes. We accomplish little and do immeasurable harm, when we force-fit students into pre-set curricula and then blithely proceed to flunk them when they refuse to fit in as we have programmed. The Greeks called this mythic torture the Procrustean bed. No one wins in this Procrustean fitting game, but students always lose.

"All Children Should Be Treated Alike"

> *Should children be treated alike? No! My opinion of this is that all children cannot be treated alike. All children are not alike. They are different in so many ways. They have different opinions about certain things. For instance this topic on which I am writing, wherein I say no another child will say yes. All children are not alike because they are brought up under different environments. Children have differences in doing many things such as: eating, writing, and even thinking. Therefore they are different because no two people are alike.*
>
> *Pamela M.*

The pleading quality of Pamela's comment is not surprising considering the treatment of human differences in our schools. Human differences are viewed as obstructions to efficient classroom operation to be administratively eliminated. Our schools' emphasis upon evaluation, their time-in-grade system of advancement, their architectural and hierarchical structures ignore,

and eventually encourage students to ignore, the differences which provide any healthy person with a sense of self. Does Mary want a drink of water? She must wait until the lesson is completed. No one bothers to think that Mary's thirst may prevent her from paying attention to her lesson. Does Billy feel squirmy and want to take a run around the building? That's too bad -- no squirmy behavior is allowed in school. Good students don't squirm; good students move only when told to move. They listen to what they are being told, and think as they are told to think -- about the "right" answers. It never seems to occur to many teachers planning lessons that the most right answer is the answer which fits a child's need.

Somehow, it is always the student who is made to bend to the demands of the institution. Yet we naively continue to believe that the institution of school exists only to further Johnny's growth and development. Why, then, do so many Johnnys drop out of school? Recent studies recognize that the drop-out is acting in self-defense; school is perceived by many youngsters as an unfair battle where their survival mechanisms are taken from them, and where their natural alliances with other students are viewed with suspicion. Too many schools are sites of psychological and sometimes physical warfare between children and their educators. Stripping a child's individuality from him in the name of "we don't have time for that" (which the child hears as "you don't have time for <u>me</u>") will either cripple the child psychologically or make him a determined enemy.

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Children are not raw material to be "improved" by teachers into a socially viable finished product. Children are individual beings and, like any other individuals, will resist, as best they can, being handled at the level of the lowest common denominator. Many children's IQ will actually diminish the longer they remain in school. We will not educate our young by forcing them to surrender their wills to us so that we may perfect their minds. A little reflection will tell us that we were educated in much the same manner, and that our notions of perfection and discipline are probably born out of the frustration and degradation we experienced as helpless students wending our way through unfamiliar mazes. We must not continue to pursue practices which deny children their most basic human qualities.

"Competition in Class is Good" and "Grading is Good"

> *Failure is not good for kids due to the fact that it often tends to develop a mental complex. In his attempt to find success he often experiments with drugs and alcohol. The failure of a kid often leads to an early death because he finds nothing to live for. Success can be measured in terms of enjoyment, and failure can only be measured in terms of disappointment.*
>
> *6th Grade, Author Unknown*

Competition and its handmaiden, the grading system, are two of the greatest problems facing an educator wishing to reform our classroom or school system. We do not advocate the abolition of competition or grades per se; we are certain

that a healthy mixture of competition and cooperation is necessary as a twentieth-century "survival tool." However, American education has too long emphasized competition at the expense of a positive, rewarding, and mutual learning process.

Grades serve as a convenient shorthand for the evaluation of a child's performance, but they are over-generalized and imply that all students have learned the same thing. Indirectly, grades also tend to give disproportionate importance to easily measurable subjects at the expense of other topics which are vital to children's development, such as the love for learning, appreciation of beauty, or the teaching of compassion. Relaxed play of a child's curiosity which leads him down new paths of understanding and enlightenment is scarce. Finally, grades tend to instill very limited values, by training children to follow a totally external system of rewards, motivation, and achievement contrary to the ideals which we think we are serving.

Competition in school teaches children more than we know. It teaches them, as Philip Slater has recently pointed out, that rewards are scarce and that other children are to be viewed as threats and rivals. What is not scarce is the frantic, nervous concentration of children competing for the teacher's good graces and good grades. The educational games lock them into the teacher's authority and force them to view one another with suspicion. Is it any wonder that our society is so hard pressed to find grounds of mutual trust and cooperation toward the remedying of our major social crises?

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Competition for grades has become a zero-sum game, in which the possibility of winners requires the existence of losers. To grant A's we must grant F's. Children themselves get trapped into this vicious mind-set, soon beginning to respect only hard-marking teachers and often ridiculing teachers who are easy markers. It is themselves they ridicule and themselves they torture -- and we who have taught them these lessons.

"Schooling Can Only Be Changed Slowly"

As one wag has pointed out, it's easier to change a cemetery than a school. Numerous threads make up the fabric of a school system: parents, school boards, students, teachers, teacher-education institutions. Working with only one or two of these threads in limited ways runs a high risk of failure. The system is far too complex and interwoven; individual strands are quickly snipped or dyed, and the net result is nil.

Changing too slowly or in too limited a way carries further risks. A little change provides no real test of the innovation. More often, in fact, it will produce spurious and misleading results: failure of a new project may be erroneously attributed to the innovations when the real cause may be difficulties inherited from the past. Or, the success of a new idea may be incorrectly attributed to positive elements in the old system.

In addition to providing a perspective for accurate evaluation of both the innovations and the old system, radical change

may enable an idea to be tested where the present educational structure foredooms single reforms. A flexibly scheduled school day will accomplish little unless both teachers and students are educated to the new possibilities which an open time-space structure makes available. For basic changes in the output of any system, it is necessary to compile a critical mass of new input to ensure that the total ecology of the system will in fact change. Institutional reform in this society has been largely unsuccessful because reforms have been introduced individually and have been rapidly obscured and neutralized by the ongoing process of the system.

Another factor, harder to assess, involves the publicity and hoopla which generally announce new reforms in our social systems. Much of the energy allocated to the reforms is often spent in publicizing them. When they do not perform as promised, the net result may be disillusionment. This kind of credibility gap, which now seems to exist throughout our society, makes it necessary for us to be cautious about being too cautious. We cannot afford many more failures before our social systems lose all credibility whatsoever. History seems to indicate that gradual reform, however reasonable it may seem, does not produce adequate results. Reasonable men may make errors, but only dogmatists will persist in repeating them. Unfortunately, the word "radical" has acquired unsavory connotations. The American space program was a radical departure for our nation, yet not an irrational program; it was comprehensive, bold, and

imaginative. Our educational crisis demands no less in the way of scope, daring, and imagination. It is not the moon which is at stake, but our earth itself.

"You Shouldn't Experiment With Children in Schools"

In most public schools, the mere mention of the word "experiment" usually sends out shock waves sufficient to preclude any attempts at major reform. Experimentation has become a scapegoat for people who are already facing enormous difficulties in maintaining the status quo. And the pressure of enrollment, budget, and, until very recently, manpower shortages have forced those not threatened by the idea of experimentation to regard it at best as a luxury.

The risks of maintaining the status quo are now as great, or greater, than the risks of exploring educational alternatives. If our society is changing at a rapid rate while our schools are changing at a much slower rate and, in some cases, remaining constant, we are in the ironic position of experimentation by default. The situation is not unlike that of a man who attends an afternoon rodeo in Madison Square Garden dressed in casual attire. If he stays on to attend an evening concert, he will be inappropriately dressed. Most schools in our educational system are undergoing the same kind of gradual separation from society. To continue on such a course is to develop our own twentieth-century version of the Saber Tooth Curriculum.

Experimentation, on the other hand, produces three immediate benefits. First, more resources become available, either in the form of funding transition costs, or simply through the reallocation of monies budgeted for items no longer required. Second, the monitoring process set up as part of the experiment assures the school of more attention than it would have received under the former arrangement. The "Hawthorne effect" resulting from the experiment and the increased attention tends to produce new benefits which would have been unknown previously. Finally, the increased monitoring ensures that any problems will be remedied promptly; too often they now go unnoticed in schools operating much as they have for the last fifty years.

The process of experimentation does not imply that all existing practice is unsound. It simply recognizes that there is often more than one way to succeed -- especially where so many human variables are present. We would be naive to believe that one good way is likely to work for all situations.

"You Can't Change Education Because 'They' Won't Let You"

We often define educational problems so that a malevolent "they" bear the responsibility. None of us has any trouble pinpointing who "they" are. "They" are the legislators, the state certification committees, the parents, the federal government, the kids, the budget officers for school districts, school boards, teachers -- the list includes virtually every major force on the contemporary educational scene.

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"They" become the handy catchall for many of our frustrations with "the system." "They" can take a variety of unusual forms:

> "You can't change kindergarten because you have to prepare the kids for first grade." (Substitute any pair of levels you wish, through the Ph.D.)
>
> "I haven't any idea what to do. Let's hire a consultant and let him solve it for us. If it doesn't work, we can blame it on him."

If we define educational problems so the responsibility lies elsewhere, we get ourselves off the hook -- and little gets done or is ever attempted.

It is intriguing to contemplate what might occur without these handy excuses. If we were able to remove all the familiar roadblocks -- all the restrictive laws, regulations, and requirements imposed by each group -- and supply every school system with all the money needed for any radically conceived alternative, just how different would the resulting innovation be? Would we invent new "theys" to replace the old ones?

While such fortuitous circumstances as described above are difficult to imagine, an unusual catalyst can be injected into the system which will throw "them" off guard and permit new ideas to succeed where previously they had failed. For example, a group of high school students visiting a university interested in promoting some of its educational innovations were offered the university's help free of charge if they could convince their respective school districts to implement a major innovation. One high school student body sold their principal, the school

board, the faculty, and the community. The school adopted the innovation, in this case flexible scheduling, and the system saved the sum of $5,900.

Unfortunately, such "success stories" are rare, partly due to our lack of interest in becoming our own catalyst. As Walt Kelly's Pogo said so well, "We have met the enemy and they are us."

"You Can't Change Education Without More Money"

Many of us believe that it is impossible to make major changes without large infusions of money. Change then becomes wholly dependent upon grants from the state or federal governments. Not unexpectedly, ideas are often shelved and eventually lost because another form of "they" has prevented action. Another major problem in counting on large sums of money to effect change is a dependency which jeopardizes the innovation if funding is removed.

Clearly, changes in the educational structure which do not require additional resources are more favorably received, and are more likely to be continued. The easiest way to avoid major recurrent costs is through the reallocation of resources. Most schools still operate on the rather rigid fixed budget which, in a hypothetical case, might allow for ten teachers at the rate of $10,000 a year. Suppose a superintendent wishes to hire an "expert" in a particular field whose current position pays much

more than the $10,000 per teacher limit. By employing paraprofessionals at lower salaries to perform routine functions, the superintendent can hire an expert teacher at a competitive salary, while improving teaching staff who now have more time for self-enrichment, individual instruction and tutoring, and lesson preparation.

Another budgetary option which requires no additional resources might be called a "squeeze-offset" approach. This strategy assumes that 100 percent of any present budget is not necessary for successful performance. The resources are arbitrarily reduced to 90 percent with no reduction in the task. The remaining 10 percent becomes available for new programs.

We must realize that the greatest costs in any major educational innovation are costs of transition from the old system to the new; at the same time we must prepare ourselves for self-sufficiency. Imaginative use of present resources helps ensure that, once "seed money" has dried up, continuance of the program is possible.

"Local School Boards Control Education"

One of the most popular misconceptions about the process of educational reform is that local school boards control American education. Studies both in large cities and the suburbs indicate that school board members have neither the information

nor the facility, much less the authority to control policy. Policy decisions rest largely with school professionals. School boards are authorized to make final determinations about budgetary and policy matters that too often have already been decided either by state law or teacher contract. When they do strike out on their own, they are subject to conflicting and divisive pressures. No one comes to the school board to praise its decisions; people only come to petition and complain. Parents' organizations petition for better bus service, teachers' organizations petition for higher salaries, students petition for more rights, and politicians attack the schools for the manifestations of these conflicting pressures.

Caught in the middle of these competing forces, out of bewilderment the school board members often reject all suggestions for change. Under such conditions, it is tempting for school board members to insulate themselves completely and make their decisions arbitrarily.

Considering that school boards have to prepare budgets without any real control over referendum votes or the local tax bases which provide their monies, one becomes aware of the awesome juggling act which school boards are normally forced to perform. They must somehow match uncertain resources to growing demands from all quarters to produce an effective educational program.

Unfortunately, when a coordinated educational program is now required more than ever to foster the kinds of change which

will sustain our society, the local school boards can hardly be said to control local education. If anything, they are yet another factor in an anarchic situation. What is needed is the strengthening of the local school board, so that parents, teachers, and students have an equal voice in setting priorities.

OUR SOLE RECOMMENDATION: ALTERNATIVES FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

In the face of such a mythological obstacle course facing those who see the urgent need for educational reform, what can be realistically suggested?

One avenue, which will open up a variety of useful strategies is the encouragement of alternative educational models. "The One Best Way" myth leads us on an endless search for perfection, at the cost of many useful sub-systems and alternatives discarded simply because they fail to address themselves simultaneously to all our concerns. The plain truth is that no magic formula exists which will make everything better. Students do not learn identically any more than teachers teach identically. Instead of knocking off the individual sharp edges, we might move in an opposite direction by making our schools fluid enough to accomodate individual differences of style, attitude, and readiness. Let us move toward a multi-faceted educational system incorporating what we know of human diversity, with mechanisms for choice and change.

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We recommend that new public school systems be created which are entirely independent of all present local and state regulations (other than those protecting the rights of the individual against racial discrimination). For example, 10 percent of a school system's enrollment in any given year might be given the opportunity to transfer to schools operated outside of the formal educational structure, but within the community's total school budget. Participation in these experimental approaches would be at the option of parents and students -- no one would be required to attend the experimental schools and no program would be initiated without local support. Although no additional money would be required, some legislation will be necessary to free these schools from present regulatory constraints.

Some of these schools might adopt a "Summerhillian" approach, others might adopt open enrollment policies, while still others might experiment with cross-age classroom patterns. To facilitate a broad range of experimentation, a moratorium on existing requirements and regulations must be declared in these schools. They must have significant autonomy to control their situations for a long time, allowing them to devote full energies without the need to constantly stop to justify their flight from the norm. The norm, it must be remembered, is not the ideal.

It must be emphasized that these alternatives cannot be successfully tested unless parents and teachers join together in frontal assault on the educational myths discussed. Such an

attack will not be easy. What must be done is to break down the old political barriers to unite parents and teachers in the learning process with parents forming general policy and teachers applying their expertise. The myth that politics and schools do not mix must be laid to rest; new school systems must be created which make teachers accountable and parents responsible for policy.

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APPENDIX

Predictably, limits on space precluded discussion of all of the myths considered by Forum 8. Those omitted from the previous discussion are listed below for the delegates' use in creating their personal index of myths in education.

Societal Myths

1. Democracy can't work in the classroom.
2. You can't change human nature.
3. Hard work will pay off.

Teaching Myths

1. There is a "right" way to teach.
2. A teacher must be objective.
3. Testing is necessary.
4. A basic fund of knowledge must be taught to all children.
5. Teachers are interchangeable parts.

Learning Myths

1. Children learn best in a quiet, orderly classroom.
2. Capacity is fixed and unchangeable.
3. Failure is good for children.
4. Learning takes place systematically.
5. Children don't know what is good for them.
6. When a child can say it "by heart," he really knows it.
7. The earlier you learn it, the better.

Structural Myths

1. Grade levels are necessary.
2. The smaller the class, the better.
3. The more time you spend, the more you learn.
4. The more access to teachers, the more children learn.
5. The "industrial model" will save education.

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Change Myths

1. Changing the administration will change schools.
2. You have to get your goals in order first.
3. New facilities are needed for change.
4. Experts always know what to do.
5. You must be sure of your results before you start.

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